



Coaching, Evaluating and Delivering Constructive Feedback – Learning Series

Topic Nine: Aggressive, Assertive and Deferential Language Worksheet

In Topic Nine “**Diffusing Difficult Situations**,” the definitions of aggressive and assertive language were reviewed. As a reminder, aggressive language is often used to express a differing opinion and is characterized by an increase in volume and hostility, while assertive language is often used to express a differing opinion and is characterized by openness and honesty. However, an assertive response can quickly turn aggressive if the tone is harsh and loud. A third language type common to difficult situations is “deferential” language. Deferential language is often used to defer to another person and is characterized by submitting to the request or wishes of someone else.

Listed below are three scenarios that describe a situation and your goal in the situation. For each scenario, write an aggressive, an assertive, and a deferential statement expressing your goal. An example is provided below:

Example Scenario: You need to finish a report due at 2:30 PM, but your co-worker really wants you to go out for lunch.

- **Aggressive response:** I don’t care about trying out the new Italian restaurant that just opened up. I’m not going to lunch with you today.
- **Assertive response:** I’d like to try the new Italian restaurant this week, but today I need to finish this report.
- **Deferential response:** I guess this report isn’t that important. I’ll go to lunch with you.

Note: You do not need to submit your worksheet; the Answer Key will be sent within the next week.

Scenario #1

In the elevator, a co-worker tells you that your manager did not return her call and now wants you to follow up on the matter.

- **Aggressive response:**
- **Assertive response:**
- **Deferential response:**

Scenario #2

Before leaving for vacation you ask a staff member to follow up on a specific Premium Assistance Reimbursement payment. You send the staff person an e-mail explaining what you have done so far with the claim and what you would like him to do while you are on vacation. When you return you discover that he did not follow up on the claim and did not send you any information about it. You need to know the status of this claim before you meet with your manager that morning.

- **Aggressive response:**
- **Assertive response:**
- **Deferential response:**

Scenario #3

A staff person who you feel works hard and is one of the members of your unit who you can routinely count on often uses profanity. You want to say something to this staff person, but feel uncomfortable doing so because he is a good worker.

- **Aggressive response:**
- **Assertive response:**
- **Deferential response:**